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ABSTRACT

This study compared two approaches of teaching an undergraduate social studies methods course for prospective elementary teachers. Experimental Group I, consisting of 20 elementary education majors, participated in the planning and teaching of the current social studies program in their student teaching situation. Experimental Group II, consisting of 44 elementary education majors, had no contact with pupils in the social studies area of the curriculum prior to student teaching. A control group of 18 students had no social studies instruction or student teaching experience. The groups were compared in two areas: a) knowledge regarding the techniques, strategies, and methods for teaching social studies and b) teaching proficiency in the social studies area of the curriculum during the student teaching experience. Analysis of the data indicated that Experimental Group II made statistically significant gains over Group I in the first area of comparison. In the second area of comparison, there was no significant difference between the two groups, but Group I showed a significant gain in proficiency when tested at the end of the teaching experience. (Five tables of statistical data are included along with a 3-item bibliography.) (Author/BRB)

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CLASSROOM vs. PEER PRE-STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCES

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Article Summary

This article compares two approaches of teaching the undergraduate social studies methods course for prospective elementary teachers. One group had no contact with youngsters in the social studies area of the curriculum prior to student teaching. The other group participated in the planning and teaching of the on-going social studies program in what-was-to-be their student teaching situation. The groups were compared in two areas: 1) knowledge regarding the techniques, strategies, and methods for teaching social studies; and, 2) their teaching proficiency in the social studies area of the curriculum during the student teaching experience.

The article goes into detail regarding the design of the study and analysis of the data. This detail is necessary so that the reader will have a more complete understanding of the results and will be able to more critically evaluate the implications.

INTRODUCTION

Education in the United States is being critically appraised from many and varied segments of our society. Much of this questioning is directed at the education of teachers. It has become an increasingly difficult task to prepare teachers to work effectively with young people in our contemporary society. None-the-less, this task of which we speak is of vital importance to our nation. Teacher competency results from a combination of many variables, but application of theory to classroom situations is a primary imperative for a systematic progression from student to teacher. Classroom involvement with youngsters prior to the student teaching experience is believed to be a realistic method for developing competency in directing the learning of young people.

In recent years, the provision of adequate pre-student teaching laboratory experiences in teacher education programs has become a major concern for educators throughout the United States. During the first third of the twentieth century, direct contacts with children were usually provided in laboratory or practice schools controlled by normal schools or teacher colleges. In the post-world War II era, educators were recommending that prospective teachers to be exposed to actual experiences in the public schools. It was reasoned that the prospective teachers would receive a more realistic opportunity to practice the theories learned in college (Flowers, 1948).

Today the demand is for teachers who show excellence in their ability to provide a meaningful educational experience for the students, who are well prepared in the content areas, who provide a democratic atmosphere where respect for the individual is adhered to as well as the inclusion of techniques in promoting group relationships, and who are cognizant of the importance of the theory of equality of educational opportunity. The cruciality of a teacher's

work is not be underestimated, and the pre-student teaching education of the teacher is of prime importance.

Education instructors and students alike are agreed that pre-student teaching methods courses tend to be dull and sterile when opportunities for student involvement with children in the classroom are omitted from the program (Drumheller and Paris, 1966). Student descriptions of education courses as Micky Mouse, unreal, and not relevant, coupled with the knowledge that success in learning is greatly dependent upon the quality of teaching, have been factors in establishing experience oriented curriculums which utilize real children and real situations.

John I. Goodlad states:

If there is any place in the teacher education program where theory and practice must be brought together, it is in that phase called methods.... The continued teaching of methods courses divorced from the classroom or its simulated likeness is a malpractice which we can ill afford to perpetuate (Goodlad, 1965, pp. 265-266).

Because of the recognized importance of appropriate pre-student teaching laboratory experiences in the preparation of teachers at all levels, it is necessary to assess the calibre of a particular type of pre-service involvement.

The type of pre-service involvement referred to is that of a large amount of interaction with elementary school youngsters by prospective teachers while they are enrolled in the methods course portion of their professional education. The rationale being that the university students have an opportunity to put into immediate practice the theories, techniques, and methods to which they are exposed in the university classroom. Many institutions of higher learning are incorporating programs such as this as an integral part of the teacher training program. To date there is a severe scarcity of data regarding the success of such programs, and the little information that is available is inconclusive regarding the worth of such experience.

THE STUDY

In a study done at the University of Iowa this researcher set out to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the ratings of the teaching performance of elementary student teachers in the social studies area of the curriculum between:

- 1) those who had pre-student teaching involvement with youngsters in the social studies area of the curriculum while enrolled in the social studies methods course;
- 2) those who had no involvement with youngsters in the social studies area of the curriculum while enrolled in the social studies methods course;
- 3) those who had no involvement with youngsters in the social studies area of the curriculum prior to student teaching and who were not enrolled in the social studies methods course.

The sample, consisting of eighty-two (82) students, was selected from all of the elementary education majors involved in their professional semester at the University of Iowa. These students made up the three groups involved in the study. Experimental Group I, twenty (20) students, met with the researcher during the methods course portion of the professional semester two hours per week for lecture-discussion of the typical course content. The course content topics covered were as follows: social studies objectives, planning, international understanding, evaluation, uses of social studies textbooks, reading and nonreading materials, charts and graphs, map and globe skills, current events, and discipline. The second hour was used to discuss the experiences these students were having in teaching elementary social studies. In addition, these students had the daily experience of working in the classrooms in which they would be doing their student teaching. There they participated in the planning and teaching of the ongoing social studies program of the school.

Experimental Group II, consisting of forty-four (44) students was enrolled

in the regular social studies methods course taught by the researcher. These students were involved in lecture-discussion of the typical course content, writing a social studies resource unit, teaching a ten (10) minute simulated classroom social studies lesson to their peers involving the use of a teaching aid and a manipulative bulletin board. The topics for these simulated lessons centered around the various aspects of cartoons, graphs, charts, maps, globes, current events, and use of textbooks. After each lesson there was a discussion of the strong points of the presentation and areas where improvement was needed. The group and instructor also suggested alternate methods and techniques that could be used to achieve the intended objectives.

The Control Group, eighteen (18) students, was not involved in any formal social studies instruction nor did they have any pre-student teaching experience in the social studies area of the curriculum.

All the students involved in the study were given a pre- and post-test covering content involving teaching methods and techniques of social studies content and skills. In addition, the Experimental Group I students were rated on their proficiency of teaching social studies by their cooperating teachers both at the end of the pre-student teaching experience and at the termination of their student teaching. The students in Experimental Group II and the Control Group were rated at the end of the student teaching experience.

THE FINDINGS

The major findings of this study indicated that both groups involved in the social studies methods course made statistically significant gains over the Control Group with regard to knowledge concerning the teaching of elementary social studies. Further analysis of the data indicated that Experimental Group II (social studies methods but not classroom experience) made statistically significant gains over

Experimental Group I (social studies methods with coinciding classroom experience) in the area of knowledge relating to the techniques and strategies of teaching elementary social studies. The statistical data reflecting these outcomes is evidenced in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1
GROUP CELL MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS--DIFFERENCES
PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST OF KNOWLEDGE

Group	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Experimental Group I (1)	20	-3.4	4.94
Experimental Group II (2)	44	-5.09	3.37
Control Group (3)	18	.06	5.56

Table 2
t-SCORES FOR INTER-GROUP ANALYSIS⁺

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
1		4.54*	-2.09*
2			-5.03*
3			

⁺Using a one-tailed critical region expecting Experimental Groups I and II to make statistically significantly greater gains than the Control Group and expecting Experimental Group II to make statistically significantly greater gains than Experimental Group I.

*Significant at the .05 level.

The three groups of students were also rated on their social studies teaching proficiency. The areas evaluated were social studies activities, cartoons, charts and graphs, current events, planning, evaluation, maps and globes, reference materials, and textbooks. Each cooperating teacher participating in the study was trained by the researcher to use the rating instrument. Each criterion on the rating form was defined and discussed along with the accompanying key. The length and number of training sessions varied with the individual cooperating teachers, according to their knowledge and understanding of social studies methods and the rating instrument. The raters were instructed to observe each social studies lesson so as to be able to rate their student teachers more accurately.

The reliability of the rating instrument was obtained by using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for Internal Consistency. The results of those calculations are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS FOR SUBGROUPS ON
THE TEACHING PROFICIENCY RATING INSTRUMENT

<u>Subgroup</u>	<u>Alpha Coefficient</u>
Activities	0.91
Cartoons	0.94
Charts and Graphs	0.93
Current Events	0.95
Planning	0.93
Evaluation	0.92
Maps and Globes	0.96
Reference Materials	0.91
Textbooks	0.98

The Alpha Coefficients indicate that there is a high degree of relationship among the items in each of the subgroups on this instrument. These reliability coefficients also indicate that there was a high tendency for the raters to be consistent in their ratings for each criterion with each of the subgroups of the rating form.

The Experimental Group I students (social studies methods with classroom experience) were rated both at the end of the methods course and at the termination of the student teaching experience. These prospective teachers had a statistically significant increase in their scores at the latter rating as indicated in Table 4.

TABLE 4
COMPARISON OF PRE-STUDENT TEACHING RATINGS AND STUDENT
TEACHING RATINGS OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP I

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Variance</u>	<u>t-Score</u>
Pre-student teaching	20	4.79	1.42	
Student teaching	18	5.46	1.04	-1.82*

*Significant at the .05 level.

When the student teaching ratings of Experimental Groups I and II were compared, there was no statistically significant difference. These figures can be evidenced in Table 5 on page 8

TABLE 5
COMPARISON OF THE STUDENT TEACHING RATINGS OF
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP II AND THE STUDENT
TEACHING RATINGS OF EXPERIMENTAL
GROUP I

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Variance</u>	<u>t-Score</u>
Exp. Group II	36	5.30	1.03	
Exp. Group I	18	5.46	1.02	-0.56

Both Experimental Groups were rated statistically significantly higher than the Control regarding social studies teaching proficiency.

From the data presented in this paper, the following conclusions can reasonably be drawn:

1. Students completing methods courses in elementary social studies have greater knowledge regarding the teaching techniques and strategies appropriate for that curricular area than those students not completing the same course.
2. Students spending a significant percentage of time in elementary social studies classrooms while enrolled in that curricular methods course have statistically significantly less knowledge concerning the teaching of social studies than those having no contact with children while enrolled in the same course.
3. When compared with students who completed the social studies methods course lacking contact with youngsters, those students who spent a large amount of time during the social studies methods course teaching the curricular area in elementary schools were not rated statistically significantly higher in teaching proficiency at the end of the student teaching experience.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study seem to indicate that all prospective elementary teachers be required to complete a social studies methods course prior to the

student teaching experience. Generalizing this finding it would appropriate that all future teachers be required to complete methods courses in all curricular areas. It does not seem appropriate for teachers in training to be required to complete only four of six such courses. When this is the case, some portion of the curriculum will be deficient for those students.

The data in this piece of research also seems to indicate a reevaluation of the structure of many methods courses needs to take place. It has been evidenced that time taken away from lecture-discussion for the sake of "hands on" experience results in less knowledge concerning the techniques and strategies of teaching social studies. While sacrificing very important content to which prospective teachers should be exposed, we do not seem to be producing better teachers by giving them an opportunity to immediately practice the theory to which they are exposed in the university classroom.

There are an increasing number of programs being adopted where at least one half of the methods course time is spent working in elementary classrooms. Many coordinators of such programs are given released teaching time to attend to the monumental administrative tasks that are inherent in such programs. In light of the fact that these programs do not necessarily produce better teachers--there is a good chance that inferior teachers result--how can educational institutions justify what amounts to flagrant spending of tax and tuition dollars.

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